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OLYMPICS/USSR THREATS

RATHER: The attorney general of the United States today publicly and formally charged the Soviet Union with practicing international terrorism by hate letter. Speaking to the American Bar Association, William French Smith said hate mail sent to 19 nations to discourage them from sending teams to the Los Angeles Olympics bore the letterhead of the KKK, but Smith said they were really concocted by the KGB and made in the USSR. Rita Braver reports.

BRAVER: For the first time, the administration charged that threatening and abusive letters sent to African and Asian Olympic athletes had been forged by the Soviet Union. The letters, sent before the Olympics, claimed to be from the Ku Klux Klan. They had warned the athletes, 'Our Olympic flames are ready to incinerate you.' In a Chicago speech, the attorney general said that American intelligence had shown the letters to be classic examples of Soviet disinformation (sic). WILLIAM\FRENCH\SMITH (attorney general): They were not produced or sent by the Ku Klux Klan. They were, instead, manufactured and mailed by another organization devoted to terror, the KGB.

BRAVER: Smith accused the Soviets of employing cynical falsehood to try to get other nations to join their Olympic boycott. SMITH: These forgeries are deserving of worldwide censure and should serve as a warning of Soviet efforts.

BRAVER: Why release the information now when Olympics athletes could face the risk of terrorism? FBI Director William Webster: WILLIAM\WEBSTER (FBI director): There may always be risks of that kind. But I think the, the truth is important enough, ah, to take the risks. And we are already prepared for those kinds of things, at least at this time in Los Angeles, as you know.

BRAVER: In Los Angeles, the International Olympic Committee said the countries that received the letters had not considered them a serious threat. PETER\UEBERROTH (president, L.A. Olympics): Ah, they thought it was an isolated crank of some sort.

BRAVER: Late today, the Soviet government said, 'We completely reject these charges.' Justice Department sources say it was the attorney general's own idea to launch the attack. His remarks were cleared with the State Department, the intelligence community and the White House. Rita Braver, CBS News, Chicago.

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